



**Saskatchewan  
Health Authority**

## We are here to help

Support is available. If you need to speak with someone, please contact Palliative Care Services which includes bereavement support. For more information about **Palliative Care Services** and bereavement support services contact 655-5868.

Other sources of support include the following:

### **Spiritual Care Support**

St. Paul's Hospital (306) 655-5000  
Humboldt and area (306) 682-8139

### **Social Worker Support**

Royal University Hospital (306) 655-2579  
St. Paul's Hospital (306) 655-5519  
Saskatoon City Hospital (306) 655-8352

**Palliative Care Support** (306) 655-5868

### **In rural areas**

Contact your local hospital or health centre.

### **Acknowledgements**

*Grief - Coping with Challenges*  
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[saskhealthauthority.ca](http://saskhealthauthority.ca)

[www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/palliative-care](http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/palliative-care)

# Helping Children Grieve

## What to Expect and Things to Remember



"Green Skies and Purple Seas Sunset"  
courtesy of Gina De Gorna

## Palliative Care Services



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## . . . Children's and teen's grief

If your children are old enough to love then they are old enough to grieve. They feel sadness and yearning after the loss of a family member or friend, and look to the adults in their lives to show them what to expect and how to deal with all the troubling thoughts and feelings that may surface.

As a parent you will be faced with the challenge of coping with your own grief at the same time as your children will need your support with theirs. Sometimes you may find it hard to listen to their anger or sadness because it brings out deep emotion that you may have tried to avoid. Keep in mind that for you and your children the best way to survive this loss is to be open with the feelings and questions that will come.

This information is provided to help you anticipate and understand the changing needs of your children and teens when a death has occurred in your family. Remember that this information is only a guideline and that everyone will grieve in their own way and time.

## . . . Walking the edges

### **SOCIAL**

Avoidance of peers or social situations  
Increased dependence on parents or caregivers

### **PHYSICAL**

Dizziness, restlessness, and weakness  
Diarrhea, constipation, vomiting or stomach ache  
Changes in appetite and sleep patterns

### **EMOTIONAL**

Withdrawal or explosive temper tantrums  
Numb or flat expression  
Feeling alone or scared

### **MENTAL**

Confusion and disbelief  
Poor concentration and forgetfulness  
Focused on the topic of death or the person who died

### **SPIRITUAL**

Blaming God, parents or self  
Wishing to die, or to be with the person who died  
No belief in the future (older children)

### **Important Reminder**

Include your child in remembrance rituals.

## ... Entering the depths

Adjusting to loss . . .

### **SOCIAL**

Wanting (but not asking for) the attention of parents and other important adults

Self-consciousness with friends about the loss

### **PHYSICAL**

Continuation of earlier responses

Low energy

May have symptoms of the illness that the person died from

### **EMOTIONAL**

Unexpected mood swings

Feeling hopeless, sad, guilty, fearful or angry

Acute sense of missing the person and yearning for the person to come back to life

### **MENTAL**

Daydreaming, forgetfulness and confusion

Doubt or denial about the cause of death or its permanence

### **SPIRITUAL**

Continued blaming of God, parents or self

May seek comfort in thoughts and questions about Heaven or saying prayers

### **Important Reminder**

Recognize and support your child's unique style and pace through grief.

## ... Mending the heart

As life goes on . . .

### **SOCIAL**

Restored desire for independence

Interest in new activities and friendships

### **PHYSICAL**

Reduction of previous physical responses

Renewed energy for activity

Return to usual sleep and eating patterns

### **EMOTIONAL**

Emotions settle down and become less intense

More happiness and self confidence

Less guilt, fear and anger

### **MENTAL**

Improved concentration and understanding

Less focus on the death and the person who died

Increased maturity

### **SPIRITUAL**

Reconnection with faith and less blame

Able to forgive self, parents and others

### **Important Reminder**

Expect periodic returns to grieving at significant transitions in your child's life.

## ... About grieving children and teens

### Three Things to Remember When Supporting Grieving Children and Teens:

Children and teens are frightened by what they don't know or don't understand.

*Find ways to explain the death in simple concrete terms. Explain what a dead person will no longer do (i.e. walk, eat, breathe, feel).*

Children and teens look to the important adults in their lives to learn how to grieve.

*Help them understand that feelings of sadness and anger are normal. Also, help them to find safe, acceptable ways to express these feelings.*

Children and teens are not likely to talk about their questions or feelings about the death if you don't.

*Your children are sensitive to your moods and behavior. If they sense that you don't want to talk about the person who died they will keep their feelings inside too.*

Things to remember . . .

## ... Suggested reading

### For Parents and Caregivers:

#### ***The grieving child: A parent's guide.***

By H. Fitzgerald

#### ***How do we tell the children?***

A step by step guide for helping children two to teen cope when someone dies.

By D. Schaefer and C. Lyons

### For Children and Teens:

#### **Age 3–11**

#### ***The Education of Little Tree.***

By F. Carter and R. Strickland.

#### ***When dinosaurs die:***

#### ***A guide to understanding death.***

By L. Krasny Brown

#### ***The tenth good thing about Barney.***

By J. Viorst

#### **Age 12–17**

#### ***When a friend dies:***

#### ***A book for teens about grieving and healing.***

By Gootman, Espeland & Stith

#### ***Fire in my heart. Ice in my veins.***

A journal for teenagers experiencing a loss.

By E. Traisman

Reading resources . . .